Introduction to the Special Issue

GLOBALIZATION THIRTY YEARS ON: PROMISES, REALITIES AND MORALS FOR THE FUTURE

SPECIAL ISSUE EDITORS

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The last decade of the twentieth century was a momentous period in contemporary history. A revolutionary wave that started in Poland in 1989, and continued in Hungary, East Germany and elsewhere, led to the end of Soviet domination in Central and Eastern Europe, and ultimately the collapse, in 1991, of the Soviet Union itself. Today, the contrast between the current direction that the world is headed and the accelerated globalization of the 1990s is pronounced. While in the aftermath of the Soviet Bloc's defeat, the discourse of capitalist triumphalism prevailed—with Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" thesis as its most influential example (Fukuyama 1992)—three decades on, more cautious assessments are in order. Although global capitalism—especially of a particular, neoliberal kind—has maintained its tight grip over almost the entire globe, the obituaries written in the early 1990s, for social democracy, the state, the nation, sometimes modernity itself, now seem utterly premature. Far from homogenizing the world, the processes of globalization have clashed with tendencies toward fragmentation, globalism has been undermined by nationalism, and the hegemony of free-market economics is often described as zombie-like, exhausted by challenges both on the right and the left (Peck 2014). The articles gathered together in this special issue of the *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Global Studies* look back at the hopes that were invested in the new world of the 1990s as it was emerging out of the ashes of the great ideological battles of the twentieth century, consider what went wrong to produce its unforeseen dysfunctions, and postulate some tentative ways to get out of the multiple crises we find ourselves in at the outset of the 2020s. In this introductory article we map the insights provided in the following four contributions to this issue—by Darren J. O'Byrne, Paul Kennedy, Andrew Z. Katz, and Zdzisław Mach—while complementing them with our own observations. The first part takes a brief look at how the 1990s were interpreted by intellectuals and commentators at that time. The second part descends from the realm of dreams to the realities on the ground and sheds some light on recent developments, including the rise of national populism. Finally, the third part, which is more explicitly normative in nature, takes a glimpse into the future.

When the World Was Being Flattened

The end of the Cold War opened the way to a far-reaching and multidimensional social transformation on both sides of the former geopolitical divide (Soborski 2013). Perhaps most importantly, the world then, as much as now, was subject to rapid advances in the means of

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communication. Indeed, technology played a major role in the collapse of statist communism as well as triggering the meteoric rise of international non-governmental organizations worldwide. In terms of political economy, the possibility of cheap real-time communication across any distance, in conjunction with the reduction of trade barriers, enabled outsourcing of many processes and segments of production. The resulting extension of economic operations to worldwide scales facilitated a more effective externalizing of the costs of capitalism. The new opportunities for capital accumulation, in combination with the disintegration of the model that had for seventy years posed a real challenge to the capitalist system, left the latter triumphant, at least for a decade or so, in spite of the massive turbulences brought about by its recurrent crises. At the same time, the capitalist system itself was also being transformed in comparison with the Keynesian type dominant for much of the post-Second World War period in Europe and, to some degree, in the United States. The increased mobility of capital, along with the assumed weakening of state-managed regulatory mechanisms, gave capitalism an unapologetic face, leading to grave socio-economic problems, such as unprecedented inequality and environmental degradation worldwide. Resistance to these outcomes of the capitalist economy was expressed, on a discursive level at least, with unparalleled emphasis on transnational solidarities, while the organization of the protest was mediated by new communication tools that have proved able, now and then, to circumvent control by the authorities.

Journalists, politicians and business gurus rushed to explain this set of diverse technological, political and economic developments while social sciences became "full of enthusiasts claiming that a new form of human society is emerging" (Mann 2000, 1467). In the quest to find a common denominator to explain the transformation, the concept of globalization was turned into a key buzzword of both political discourse and social inquiry, an idea that was allegedly capable of capturing the meaning and implications of the new realities. The intellectual climate of that time and the then centrality of the concept of globalization is masterly explored in the next article by British sociologist Darren J. O'Byrne. O'Byrne demonstrates how the claims purporting epochal changes in various areas of social life implied a major paradigm shift with globalization at the very heart of the transformation. For O'Byrne, the globalization debate, particularly in its early development, had a distinctly apocalyptic connotation that was played out in four interrelated dimensions captured by the discourses of the four "ends": of ideology, history, organized capitalism and the nation-state. O'Byrne provides an insightful overview of competing interpretations that social scientists have offered to make sense of the post-Cold War order. He shows that they often amplified the sense of novelty and rupture, indeed projecting the Zeitgeist of that short period as the Weltgeist of a new era. But, as O'Byrne remarks, this proved to be only a "transitory apocalypse" and almost as soon as globalization was thrown onto the world's stage, its obituaries began to be published. We will return to the end-of-globalization debate shortly—and briefly, as the account provided by O'Byrne is unbeatably nuanced and witty—but first, what was that new era expected to deliver?

The potential of globalization to benefit everyone was touted in the nineties and noughties by the neoliberal establishment. The dominant narrative revolved around the prospects for prosperity and peace to be achieved through globalization of the "free" market economy. To get a glimpse into the prevailing ideological vibe of the time it is worth recalling the prolific author and celebrity of the New York Times, Thomas Friedman, and his peculiar take on the democratic peace theory that he peddled as Golden Arches—and later Dell—Theory of Conflict Prevention. Friedman wrote "When a country reached a level of economic development where it had a middle class big enough to support a McDonald's network, it became a McDonald's country. And people in McDonald's countries didn't like to fight wars anymore, they preferred to wait in line for burgers" (2000, 249). According to the hegemonic narrative of the time, the rising tide of globalization was a harbinger of peace and prosperity that could lift all boats. However, it was also presented as unforgiving to any dissent from the orthodoxy of neoliberal economics. Thus, Friedman advised states in no uncertain terms to "accept the verdicts of the global markets" and "be ready to take punishment" (2000, 363). Similar narratives reifying the global market and praising those who endure inevitable hardships, but are eventually rewarded for their heroism,

populated the pages of neoliberal news-outlets press. While many more examples could be given—neoliberals never underestimated the power of ideas to establish and consolidate hegemony and their ideological output has been invariably voluminous and consistent (Soborski 2018; also see Soborski 2009)—it is perhaps most appropriate to turn to a politician whose career had spanned almost the entire post-Cold War era until it was cut short, or at least interrupted, by her defeat in the 2016 USA Presidential elections. Going back to October 1999, the then First Lady, Hillary Clinton spoke at a conference in Warsaw that was to set the "lessons for the next decade." She said:

> Choosing the path of democracy, free markets, and freedom required great vision, courage, and moral leadership.…Certainly I have seen that here in Poland. This nation is a testament to the fact that democratic and free market reforms, when decisively and thoroughly implemented, do work. It's been three years since I last came to Warsaw, and in those years, much has changed. New businesses and shopping centers are moving into neighborhoods. New cars are crowding once empty streets. Cell phones are ringing in cafes, parks, and sidewalks—that's an annoying indication of progress. But all of them are signs that a new middle class, the backbone of any democracy, is emerging. (Clinton 1999)

Poland had indeed been a recipient of a "decisive and thorough implementation" of a radical neoliberal restructuring that Naomi Klein (2007) labelled "shock therapy"; the country is one of the main case studies of Klein's punchy critique of neoliberalism. Thus, Clinton's excitement was not shared by everyone and, as time progressed, and with the problems associated with neoliberal globalization becoming ever more acutely felt, the voices of its discontents were becoming louder if often inchoate. With the benefit of hindsight—or perhaps even without it, just by drawing on what we know about the nature of free-market fundamentalism—it is obvious that the dysfunctionalities generated by neoliberalism had to pave the way to the crisis of globalization which culminated (so far) in the 2016 election of a far-right plutocrat into the world's most powerful office. To explore this connection a bit further, let us now turn to our contributors' accounts of what happened between the "end of history" and its tumultuous return.

The Crisis of Globalization or the Globalization of Crisis?

The notion of the decline of globalization—just like the idea of its rise some thirty years ago—serves today as a convenient formula that means to capture the fundamental problems facing the world, and particularly the societies of the global North. Whereas globalization was once an all-pervasive buzzword heralding a new era in human history, so likewise the discourses portending its end have, for some time now, organized a significant share of the debate about social change in the last two decades. O'Byrne draws our attention to four crises that have served as major focal points in social theorizing about current global developments. They are the crises of capitalism, human rights, liberal democracy and the left. They are interrelated and linked with the four dimensions of the "apocalypse" that O'Byrne locates at the origin of globalization. Particular attention should be paid here to the crisis of human rights as O'Byrne is the world's leading scholar in this field. His account takes us back to a post-Cold War vision of a cosmopolitan order firmly underpinned by the idea of human rights, to be defended, if necessary, by democratic imperialism and military interventions. However, while various kinds of arguments in defense of human rights, more or less vaguely conceived, have come from often unexpected corners, and for sometimes blatantly insincere reasons—think of one of G. W. Bush administration's justifications for USA invasion of Iraq—the lack of a cohesive political force behind the discourse has meant that it could not deliver its progressive promise. Without adequate political backing and global organizational infrastructure to support it, human rights discourse has not changed the world—not yet, in any case—in the way its universalist advocates intended. Contrary to expectations discussed by O'Byrne, the nation-state refused to go away and the difference between the universal applicability of the idea of human rights and the restrictive

nature of the rights of the citizen remains acutely clear. Indeed, recent developments have brought this distinction into a sharp relief, for instance when the automatic right to naturalization of spouses and even children was arbitrarily withdrawn in some countries (UK Government 2014). Human rights are increasingly interpreted as vested only in citizens of states, an obvious contradiction in terms for citizenship is by definition exclusive.

The ongoing rise of national populism further reinforces these tendencies. Contrary to the liberal ideal of political community open to everyone regardless of nationality, ethnicity or class, the national populist vision is nativist, aiming at particularization rather than inclusion. National populism looks for enemies, internal as well as external, including native cosmopolitan elites within nations; it mobilizes followers by drawing boundaries and separating the inside from the outside. It aims to purify the nation by symbolically "expelling" the members deemed corrupt or unworthy. While populism itself is a rhetorical style rather than a mature system of political beliefs, and as such can attach itself to different political agendas or ideologies, not necessarily exclusive, the post-Cold War left has not, thus far, succeeded in articulating a compelling narrative to counter the populism of the right. Indeed, O'Byrne criticizes the left's failure to engage with globalization in order to transform it. Much of the left has capitulated to—if not implicitly embraced, as was the case with the Third Way—the neoliberal model of globalization where the market is the ultimate arbiter of what is fair and good, competition is rife, and individualism and inequality reach levels that, as Andrew Katz's article published in this issue demonstrates, make social trust extremely hard to attain. On the other hand, where leftists did mobilize against neoliberalism, this was usually with a protectionist agenda in mind, in contradiction to the internationalist, cosmopolitan legacy that lies at the source of the Western tradition of progressive politics. Instead of calling the proletariat— or, perhaps more aptly today, the "precariat"—of all countries to unite, the leading figures of the left, notably Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn, positioned themselves primarily as defenders of the rights of the American or the British workers. The left wasted the opportunities that opened up for it on several recent occasions—most importantly when neoliberal deregulation caused the greatest crisis of capitalism for almost a century (Soborski 2018, 2020)—and, thus far, has not formulated a narrative with a potential to challenge neoliberalism on a global level.

Paul Kennedy, the late British sociologist of globalization, and one of the founders of global studies in the UK, provides further prescient insights into the current crisis that he examines through the prism of the shifting political economy both on national and global levels. According to Kennedy, the main factors shaping the current (dis)order are the new type of capitalism, which he describes as vampiric in nature, and technological change that enables the functioning and expansion of this form of capital accumulation while introducing new patterns of social stratification. Deindustrialization and computerization have brought about a rapid growth in the possibilities of communication and political representation, but have also led to severe turbulences in the labor markets of many advanced societies. While in the Western world social and territorial inequalities were lessening during much of the previous century, the years leading up to the turn of the millennium and the two decades that followed it have brought a sharp reversal of this more egalitarian trend. The swift rise in inequality has led to a widespread feeling of alienation and lost influence over the direction of changes set in motion by the forces of globalization and overseen by political and cultural elites. The development of cognitive capitalism has brought an enormous sense of frustration into entire social groups incapable of finding a place for themselves in the new and volatile context. Owing to a dramatic reduction in social mobility, especially in countries most committed to neoliberal restructuring, like Britain or the USA, the idea of meritocracy has lost any practical credibility. Stemming from economic marginalization of large sections of Western societies is their growing discontent which translates into hostility to everything cosmopolitan or "globalist." As Kennedy demonstrates, the discontent increasingly reflects territorial inequalities within nations. Angry political reactions, ranging from street riots to Brexit and the presidential win of Donald Trump in 2016—that came respectively from the "yellow vests" in France and their equivalents elsewhere, "the North" in the UK, and the "fly-over states" in the USA—are the most publicized examples of the recent

politics of protest. Driven by this rage is the push for decisive action and "solutions," manifested either in the demands to settle complex questions through referenda, as in the British case, or in support for strong leaders, ready to challenge the "liberal" establishment, as in Poland and Hungary. In the process, the norms of liberal democracy become the targets of the populist backlash or are just abandoned like "orphans at the end of history," in the evocative phrasing of Andrew Z. Katz, professor of political science at Denison University.

For Katz, a major cause as well as consequence of the rise of right-wing populism is a continuing decline in the public trust in elites. In social sciences, trust is viewed as fundamental to a proper functioning of any society—its weakening is therefore a key indicator of the decay of social cohesion. Obviously, trust is a complex concept and so its erosion cannot be reduced to a few unambiguous variables. Instead, it is associated with a broad range of cultural, economic and social factors. Katz highlights in particular the materialistic ethos, the increase in competition and the spread of the winner-takes-all mentality as threatening the sense of trust. The uncritical shift towards a comprehensive marketization that followed the collapse of statist communism in Europe, has meant a subordination of a wide range of global processes to economic imperatives and an application of the market logic to almost any aspect of human interaction. Katz lays part of the blame on the academia and, more broadly, the dominant intellectual milieu which has been colonized by the kind of rationality that Max Weber viewed as the main danger associated with modernity and Jürgen Habermas (1986) opposed on post-Enlightenment grounds. Specifically, the intellectual paradigm underpinning the crisis of constitutional liberalism revolves around the concept of rational choice. The materialistic, rational, and market-driven society that it conjures is merely a contractual aggregate of individual interests with deep fissures between classes, identities, and regions. The gaps may become so large that they render any meaningful sense of community all but impossible. As a consequence, the foundations of liberal-democracy—norms that require an appropriate dose of reasoned deliberation, respect for expertise, the law, established procedures and institutions, indeed an intersubjective acceptance of facts—are undermined or "orphaned." Again, the implications are most notoriously demonstrated by the Brexit campaign as well as the communication flowing from the office of President Trump. They have led to a growing concern with the so-called "post-truth" politics. This may be accompanied by attacks on the rule of law which, according to populist voices influential in recent years in Poland or Hungary but also the UK, must not be in contradiction with "the sovereignty of the people." Of course, the crisis of liberal democracy is undermining its legitimacy not only amongst the domestic public but also in the eyes of the rest of the world. As Katz points out, while Fukuyama expected that humankind would eventually converge on liberal principles and institutions, the rivals of the West, especially China and Russia, are now challenging it not just through their economic influence and military might, but also through soft power. Indeed, their visions of political order have proven appealing to a number of illiberal leaders on the peripheries of the Western world, including Jarosław Kaczyński in Poland, Victor Orbán in Hungary, or Recep Erdoğan in Turkey.

The article by Polish sociologist and founder of European studies in Poland, Zdzisław Mach, is also a passionate defence of liberal principles. Mach's focus is on the crisis of European integration, which he considers through the prism of culture and identity. His article follows the developments in Europe in the wake of the collapse of the Iron Curtain. This was greeted with enthusiasm both in the East and the West: Europe had been divided by rival ideologies but it was expected that the end of the Soviet Bloc would pave the way to the continent's unity. Three decades later, much of this optimism has evaporated, and the border between the former West and the former East seems anything but vanished, despite the economic success of the countries formerly under the Soviet control, which are rapidly catching up with the standard of living of Western European societies. According to Mach, the loss of hope in the project of European unity is related to a pervasive cultural anomy stemming from the failure to work out a canon of shared values to support a robust collective identity. Paradoxically, this anomy has its origins in the fall of the Berlin Wall which had performed the function of a symbolic boundary demarcating European values from the communist "other." Democracy, the rule of law and human rights were

unanimously considered the cornerstone of European culture. Their value was beyond dispute as long as the Eastern Bloc lingered on as the counterpoint of the liberal Europe. The common adversary meant that internal differences between Western Europeans seemed marginal and common features were emphasized; with the adversary's defeat, the symbolic field of Europeanness became host to a new rivalry over how to define European values, or indeed whether there is such a thing. The multi-dimensional and multi-threaded effort to reconstruct European identity is now encountering increasingly significant hindrances. The fault lines in this battle of ideas reflect not only the historical heritage of individual countries and regions, but also the new geopolitical fractures related to the crisis of governance on the global level.

While Mach's focus is mainly on questions revolving around culture and identity, he acknowledges that one trigger of the EU's current problems was the crisis of the dominant economic model, which led to widespread disappointment with the direction of European integration and to a decline of public confidence in the elites at the helm of this supranational project. We would like to explore this thread a bit further. The Great Recession and then the systemic crisis within the euro area, led the EU to face an existential threat. The rescue of the bankrupted global financial sector devoured up to a third of the richest countries' GDP, and the lifebuoy was the taxpayers' money which led to a ballooning public debt and draconian austerity measures. The scale of the disaster exceeded even the collapse of the planned economy model in 1989. It turned out that the dysfunctionality of neoliberalism, on which the architecture of the common currency relies, overwhelmed the sense of community and solidarity between Europeans. It is no wonder that, in the absence of adequate social protections at either national or supranational levels, the economic experiment adopted under the influence of the neoliberal paradigm proved destabilizing if not outright destructive (Galent 2016). Considering the context of increasing social and territorial inequalities and progressive pauperization of large socio-economic groups, it was naïve to expect that European citizens would be willing to engage in intercultural cooperation for regional peace and shared prosperity. European identity, after all, remains weaker than traditional national identities; hence, if economic polarization caused huge rifts in national communities within such consolidated democracies as the UK, the USA, or France, then it should not come as a surprise that it also weakened the supranational ties within the EU as well as bringing to power illiberal leaders in some post-communist EU member states, such as Poland and Hungary. It is worth reiterating that during their post-Cold War transition the latter countries were subjected to a particularly comprehensive socio-economic restructuring based on rigid neoliberal criteria. The "shock therapy" that they underwent replicated the experiment in free market fundamentalism that had been imposed in the 1970s on Chile by Pinochet's military junta hand-in-hand with neoliberal economists from the Chicago School (Klein 2007). In short, the unquestionable significance of the cultural superstructures notwithstanding, it is vital to also keep the economic base firmly in mind when analyzing political tensions within the EU and the illiberal turn in Central Europe and elsewhere.

What is to be done?

The foregoing discussion may seem disheartening: a rapidly rising inequality, liberal democracy in crisis, decline in the sense of community, increasing prejudice, and much else, all rooted in a flawed economic system. However, when considering that system, or the dominant mode of globalization that it has spawned, it is important not to reify it as politicians are so keen to do to absolve any responsibility for their own failures. Globalization is not a *fatum* that falls upon us by the will of god or nature. It is a complex set of processes, often contradictory and incredibly complex, but ultimately a social creation and subject to human agency. It is to questions of our collective ability to shape the outcomes of globalization that we now turn. Each of our contributors provides compelling answers to the problems they identify, in each case the solutions they propose are informed by their respective priorities; taken together they constitute a compelling framework for change.

The departure point for Kennedy's normative argument connects well with what we have just said. He argues that opposing neoliberalism should not imply turning our backs to

globalization as such, but rather resistance to the direction of travel initiated in the late 1970s. The problems sown by the roughshod application of neoliberal dogma worldwide should not obscure the potential for a collective pursuit of a better world that is implicit in globalization. That ideas of shared prosperity and cooperation have been relegated to the background of social development theory and practice is not related to human nature, but rather a result of the economic model that has been forced upon the world in the course of the past four decades. Thus, we should not throw the globalization baby out with the neoliberal bathwater. While its undesirable and dysfunctional aspects need to be acknowledged and tamed, globalization also entails positive attitudes: openness to cultural diversity and interaction, and a shared responsibility for others, regardless of where they live. We would add that even in its economic aspects—which, in their current form, are rightly blamed for inequality and marginalization of large swathes of humanity—globalization has a potential to improve the lot of many people worldwide. When supplemented with appropriate redistribution mechanisms, economic openness can bring prosperity, while isolationism and autarky almost always do more harm than good. Contrary to popular perceptions, the most open economies are those where, like in Sweden, everyone shares the benefits as well as the risks of the country's immersion in global trade (Rodrik 1998)—unfortunately, this remains an exception with the rule being the privatization of profits and socialization of losses. While Kennedy views globalization as inevitable, he emphasizes the human need to feel connected, rooted and at home. Local life is as valuable as the metropolitan, cosmopolitan and global dimensions of our collective existence. Local identities provide some sense of security amid economic turmoil. Family and neighborly ties constitute an important network of economic, social and emotional support. On the other hand, atrophy of social bonds engenders a sense of loss of agency and social alienation. Importantly, robust local identities can also facilitate integration of immigrant population. Whereas the national imaginaries of the host countries may not immediately resonate with immigrants, it is usually a natural process for them to start identifying with places, people and symbols that they encounter in everyday life. The sheer fact of living in the same street and neighborhood can forge a collective identity transcending ethnic, religious and national boundaries. Kennedy discusses a plethora of reasons why it is important to commit to a revival of the local and cherish its sense of place-based intersubjectivity and posits a number of strategies to facilitate this. The guiding principle should be democratization, not just of local authorities, but also local businesses, for example through various forms of co-operatives, to give residents a real voice and sense of empowerment. Importantly, this does not imply a weakening of social movements or collective action and representation on transnational or global levels. The idea is to rejuvenate local communities, politically and economically, while opening them to democratic communication and cooperation with others so that local communities do not turn into authoritarian and inward-looking islands or fortresses.

Whereas Kennedy's argument revolves around the relationship between the global and the local, Katz focuses his attention on a more specific area of concern— namely, education, that he rightly views as determining the nature of the debate about the good society or even the possibility of having such conversation at all. Katz strives to identify the ways to counter the colonization of Western knowledge and academia by the principles of instrumental rationality. He calls for a shift in the model of university education which has become subordinated to the imperatives of commodification and professional utility. In order to break the Weberian "iron cage" of instrumental rationality and the marketization drive that stifles creative thought and disinterested pursuit of knowledge, the university needs to return to its proper function as a place of value-laden debate over the shape of the good society. Katz invokes the idea of broad civic deliberation, which is closely associated with, and facilitated by, the practice of liberal arts education, and which should be valued as a necessary counterpart to narrow specialization and training in specific skills. Modes of political communication and participation in the USA have been dominated by technocratic objectives. In public life this has meant that consumer priorities have trumped those of the citizen; to restore the balance society must return to the orphaned values of constitutional liberalism. We agree that global neoliberalism has abandoned some of

the foundational premises of liberal ideology, including the principle that individuals should enjoy equal rights and opportunities. It is vital to reflect back on both the apparent triumph of liberalism as well as the reputational damage it has suffered due to the rise to prominence of its neoliberal poor cousin. For Katz, the way for liberalism to regain its credentials as a humanist ideology, rather than an emaciated caricature of itself, is through deliberation and courageous enactment of civic culture that will help modern societies lessen their dependence on obsessive consumerism and rethink the principles to underpin a more sustainable form of collective life.

Defense of liberalism is also at the heart of the contribution by Mach who focuses on Europe as a community resting on the values of the Enlightenment. According to Mach, to get out of its current crisis, the EU will have to commit itself to a firm and unequivocal deepening of its integration, even if this means losing some of its members. The Old Continent suffered enough under the Hobbesian "war of all against all," and returning to that would be disastrous. Its post-war integration, based on the principles of rule of law, democracy and human rights, has given Europe the longest-ever period of peace and stability; it is imperative to defend this against anti-democratic, anti-liberal forces. At the time of writing (November 2020) there are some reasons to be optimistic—paradoxically, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. The EU's rejection of rigid monetarism and its move towards a more interventionist economic policy, necessitated by the pandemic and dubbed by some, with a degree of exaggeration, as Europe's "Hamiltonian moment" (Issing 2020), may help restore hope for a greater developmental convergence to narrow Europe's North-South disparities caused by the flawed implementation of the common currency. However, the fundamental dilemma is yet to be settled: will the EU be a community of values based on the heritage of the Enlightenment, or will it accept the illiberal turn in some of its member states and hence abandon the community method in favor of a new path—one of political realism, competitive, and conflictual? Everything indicates that 2021 may be a turning point in this respect.

Conclusion

It has become almost cliché for progressive academics to challenge the political inertia caused by decades of neoliberal de-politicization by drawing on Gramscian strategies of counterhegemony. Clichés may be overused but that is usually because they convey useful insights fast. "Morbid symptoms," that Gramsci described just before the Great Crash of 1929, seem to be here all over again, nine decades later. A time like this, while dysfunctional and oppressive in many ways, also provides a window of opportunity. The articles that follow point to several ways out of the mess we are in and offer the reader plenty of food for thought. We also hope that they will raise many questions, from which—as O'Byrne rightly says—"come possibilities." We have no illusion as to how much impact an academic contribution, even a collective one like this volume, can have. However, let us keep in mind the moral of one of Aesop's fables: slow and steady wins the race. While the progressive challengers of the neoliberal world order cannot match the material might of neoliberalism's main constituencies, the corporation and the transnational capitalist class, they do have the ideational resources offered by the political traditions of socialism and modern liberalism, the capacity to think beyond what is empirically given and the power to shape people's imagination. "For every ending there is a beginning"—O'Byrne aptly reminds us—and the end of neoliberalism will be no exception.

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